# THE MIDDLE ENGLISH RELIGIOUS LYRIC

BY

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# THE MIDDLE ENGLISH RELIGIOUS LYRIC

## Chapter I

## A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE FIELD

The lyrics written in England during the Middle Ages (1100-1500) are numerous and varied as to both subject matter and form. The term lyric has had several meanings attached to it and a sharp line can scarcely be drawn between it and other poetical forms. For this paper the general meaning, of a short poem expressing subjective, personal feelings either set to music or musical in form, will be sufficient. The songs of these centuries, as more of other periods, reflect the thoughts, interests and occupations of the people. The church, the state, chivalry, social life, are all to be seen mirrored in these collections of lyric poetry. The following short outline may serve as a framework upon which to base a general classification of these poems as to content.

A. Religious or moral in theme.

1. Connected with the church service.

   a. Confession.
   b. Praise and prayer.

2. Connected with Bible material.

   a. Annunciation.
   b. Nativity.

      (1) Lullabies.
      (2) Shepherds.
      (3) Wise Men.

   c. Saints.

3. Connected with the cult of the Virgin.

4. Moral instruction.

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B. Secular in theme.

1. Amorous.

2. Nature poems.

3. Critical.

a. Church.
b. Society.

As an institution the Roman Catholic church was very powerful from the time of the Norman Conquest up through the fourteenth century. It is true that it was decaying; but it is also true that, while its power was impaired, the force and influence of the church had not been destroyed. Of necessity it had to minister to many illiterate people. Along with the movement to make English History and the Bible more easily accessible to the greater number of people, came that effort to make the church service more intelligible. Many services were turned into vernacular verse and set to music, because they were more easily remembered in that form. These took the spirit of poems of confession and repentance. A typical poem of confession contained a list of the sins committed, an expression of contrition, some words of praise and adoration, and a plea for forgiveness.

With these came the poems of deep personal feeling that were a result of the contemplative life of the monks. These were in praise of the Virgin, and there were many of this class written in Latin. Here the Virgin is described as having great beauty, and as being possessed of many charms. A common comparison is that of the Virgin and a perfect Rose. Mary is thought of as the one perfect mother and maid and as a mediator between man and Christ. Together with Christ she is called a physician of the soul. The five joys of the Virgin - the annunciation, the birth of Christ, his rising from the dead, his ascension, her life with him in heaven - are endowed with special powers and are supposed

to make her more merciful. This short prayer is a good example of such poetic pleas.

"Sainte Marie, Virgine,
Moder Jesu Cristes Nazarene,
Onfo, scild, help ƿin Godric,
Onfang, bring hehlic wiðƿe in Godes ric.

"Sainte Marie, Cristis bur,
Maidenes clenhad, moderes flur,
Dilie mine sinne, rixe in min mod,
Bring me to winne wiðself God."[1]

There are poems dealing with the annunciation, the birth of Christ, the visits of the wisemen and the shepherds, the various saints, and lullabies consisting of dialogues between the Virgin and the infant Christ concerning his coming power and greatness. The religious ideas of the day are embodied in some of the songs. Christ appears as a part of the Trinity and is worshipped as such. He is pictured as dying to pay, or to atone for the sins of mankind that are manifold and overwhelming but which, through the mediation of Mary and the death of Christ, can be forgiven. The vanity and uselessness of the world and the horrors of hell are painted in vivid colors. This short poem or ditty as it is called emphasizes the uncertainty of this life and the approach of death.

"Wynter wakeneth al my care,
Neu this leves waxeth bare.
Ofte I sike ant mourne sare,
When hit cometh in my thoht,
Of this worldes joie, how hit geth al to noht.

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[1]"Middle English Reader," Cook, p. 454.

"Nou hit is, ant nou hit nys,
Also hit ner nere, y wys:
That moni mon seith, soth hit ys,
Al goth bote godes wille:
Alle we shule deye thah us like ylle.

"All that gren me graueth grene;
Nou hit faleweth albydene:
Jhesu help, that hit be sene,
Ant shild us from helle!
For ynot whider y shal, ne hou longe her duelle."[1]

The thought of inevitable death occurs frequently and is strongly emphasized. With this religious fervor come certain physical reactions such as fear, weakness, and loss of sleep. Christ is a physician, a judge, and a brother of mankind. In Patterson's "Middle English Penitential Lyric" there is a poem addressed to the guardian angel of the soul.[2] The idea of the seven deadly sins appears and the penitent frequently confesses to all of them. Pride, sloth, envy, gluttony, anger, covetousness and lechery mean certain death and punishment in after life.

Not only was Mary supposed to act as a mediator between Christ and sinful man, but the saints, the cross, the nails in the cross, and the wounds in the hands, feet and sides were supposed to perform a similar office. In one prayer the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are listed and a special plea is raised for them.[3] Pity, fear, wisdom, strength, insight, council and wit comprise the list. The Lord's prayer serves as the

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[1]"Ancient Songs and Ballads," Ritson, p. 56.
[2]"Middle English Penitential Lyric," Patterson, p. 118.
[3]"The Middle English Penitential Lyric," Patterson, p. 128.

basis for religious poems. Sometimes little is added, at others each petition forms the theme of a separate stanza.[1] The stories of the visits of the Shepherds' and the wisemen appear in these early poems always emphasizing the power and glory of the Holy infant.[2] The lullabies, in which the infant Jesus and Mary discourse of his future life and mission, follow a pretty general form and contain much the same subject matter. The following stanzas are taken from such a poem in the "Early English Lyrics" of Chambers and Sidgwick.

"This endris night I saw a sight,
A maid a cradell kepe,
And ever she song and seid among,
'Lullaby, my child, and slepe.'

. . . . . .

"'A spere so scharp shall perse my herte,
For dedes that I have done.
Fader of grace, whether thou has
Forgeten thy litell sone?

'Withouten pety here shall aby,
And make my fleshe all blo.
Adam iwis, this deth it is
For thee and many mo.'"[3]

Closely related to these religious songs are others having a strong element of moral instruction. "The Pearl," by an unknown author is one of the

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[1]"The Middle English Penitential Lyric," Patterson, pp. 108-110.
[2]"Early English Lyrics," Chambers & Sidgwick, p. 126.
[3]Ibid., pp. 119-120.

most beautiful of these poems. It tells of a father's grief, and the consolation he has on learning of his loved one's joy in Paradise. Chaucer's poem entitled "Truth" is another poem of this kind, of which the first stanza gives a good idea of the general content.

"Fle fro the pres, and dwell with sothfastness,
Suffise thin owene thing, thogh it be smal;
For hord hath hate, and clymbyng tykelnesse,
Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal;
Savoure no more thanne the byhove shal;
Reule weel thiself, that other folk canst reede,
And trouthe the shal delyvere - it is no drede.[1]

A short poem given in Chambers and Sidgwick "Early English Lyrics" is also of this general class.

The lif of this world
Ys reuled with wynd,
Wepinge, derknesse,
And steriinge;
With wind we blomen,
With wind we lassun;
With weopinge we comen,
With weopinge we passun.
With steriinge we byginnen,
With steriinge we enden,
With drede we dwellen,
With drede we wenden.[2]

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[1] "Literary Middle English Reader," A.S. Cook, p. 431.

[2] "Early English Lyrics," Chambers and Sidgwick, p. 170.

Life not connected with the church is also represented in the lyrics of the Middle Ages. Probably the first noticed are the love songs. These have certain conventional themes arising from the love codes of the time. Much, of both the subject matter and the form, is borrowed from the French troubadours. The lady is usually endowed with great physical beauty and charming manners. She has a 'dangerousness' or dignified indifference which the lover tries to overcome. If she does not return his love the lover weakens, grows pale, loses sleep, and nearly dies. Chaucer's "Merciless Beauty" contains the usual theme.

"Youre yen two woole sle me sodenly,
I may the beaute of them not sustene,
So wondeth it thorowout my herte kene."[1]

Alison, the song of the true and faithful lover, is one of the most beautiful both in form and sentiment.

"An hendy hap I chabbe yhent;
Ichot from hevene it is me sent;
From alle wymmen mi love is lent;
And lyht on Alysoun."[2]

The people of this age responded to the beauties of nature, especially of the spring, the love season. One of the earliest, at least the earliest extant song of the period, is a beautiful one to the spring.

Sing cuccu nu! Sing, cuccu!
Sing, Cuccu! Sing, cuccu, nu!

Summer is icumen in;
Lhude sing, cuccu!

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[1] "Literary Middle English Reader," A.S. Cook, p. 417.
[2] Ibid., p. 410.

Growe þ sed, and blowe þ med,

And spring þ þe wde nu.

Sing, cuccu!

Awe blete þ after lomb,

Lhou þ after calve cu;

Bulluc sterte þ , bucke verte þ;

Murie sing, cuccu!

Cuccu! cuccu!

Wel singes þu, cuccu;

Ne swik þu naver nu.[1]

The following is a humorous little poem connected with the love poetry and probably an incident of this same spring season.

"My gostly fader, I me confesse,
First to God and then to you,

"That at a window - wot you know? -
I stale a cosse of grete swetness,
Which don was out aviseness;
But hit is doon not undoon now.
My gostly fader, I me confess,
First to God and then to you.

But I restore it shall doutless
Agein, if so be that I mow;
And that to God I make a vow
And elles I axe foryefness.

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[1]"Literary Middle English Reader," Cook, p. 406.

My gostly fader, I me confess,

First to God and then to you."[1]

Already the English were becoming national and political songs as well as ballads were appearing. Thomas Wright has collected many such, and a glance through the table of contents will show the breadth of their interest.

The Christmas carols of the age embodied, beside the Bible story, songs concerning the old pagan festivals. Debates between the ivy and the holly as to their respective positions, and lively songs of the boar's head and plum pudding are typical of this class.

Not only the subject matter but the verse forms of the Middle English lyric are varied. The alliteration of the older English poetry was still present, but new rhythms based upon syllable strees and rime were coming in. The Troubadours of France contributed much to both form and subject matter, especially in the love poetry and the cult of the Virgin. Poems differed in verse and stanza length also, as well as in rime schemes. Even in one poem the lines or the stanzas, or both may be of differing lengths.

Not only the form, but the language is changing. The influence of the Scandinavian and the French is seen in the adding of new words, in the changing of spelling, and in the adding of new forms where similar words are found in both languages. Inflections are being simplified, and the dialects are being leveled. Phonetic changes due to assimilation, to the voicing of unvoiced consonants, the changing of diphthongs to other combinations or single letters, and the palatalizing of other sounds are going on.

The Middle English language reached its height in Chaucer's verse and his lyrics are among the best of the period, although few in number. For content, form and language the Middle English lyric is worth careful study.

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[1] "Early English Lyrics," Chambers and Sidgwick, p. 31.

## Chapter II.

## THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LYRIC.

Every form of literature has a beginning and a growth. No literary form springs fully developed from one man's mind at any one time. Modern forms and definitions are the result of years, or even ages, of gradual development that can frequently, if not always, be marked off into stages; not, perhaps, clearly differentiated, yet nevertheless definite in the additions that they make to the type. The Middle Ages mark both a distinct and an important stage in the growth of the lyric as a literary class. There is a vast difference between the Greek idea of a lyric, as synonomous with song, and the modern conception. A lyric today is any short, musical expression of subjective thought or feeling.[1] The Middle Ages are characterized by a lyric form in which these two ideas are contending. The personal, subjective note is entering and the type is outgrowing the old term, song. Certain poems that are sung, such as the ballad, are not essentially lyric.

Aristotle in his "Poetics" has little or nothing to say concerning the lyric; probably because he thought the form below the dignity of his idea of heroic and dramatic poetry. It is an unquestioned fact, however, that Greek lyric poetry did exist. Song is generally conceded to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, forms of emotional expression in terms of rhythm. "Thus the lyric, the chorus, is the oldest of all poetic forms, as old as self-consciousness, it lies at the very heart of the race."[2] Professors E. K. Chambers,

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[1]Reed, E.B. "English Lyrical Poetry," New Haven, 1912. p. 10.

[2]Ibid., p. 5.

G. B. Gummere, G. P. Upton and Ernest Rhys agree with Professor E. B. Reed upon the idea of rhythm as the essential, fundamental impulse in song. Primitive man it is thought, used song, in its most elemental sense, to make known his emotions of joy, sorrow, praise, love and such primitive impulses as accompanied his hunt, his warfare, and his mating. Natural physiological rhythmic actions attended these impulses both in work and in play. These first attempts at expression were choral or tribal with little individual differentiation, except as one person displayed exceptional powers as a leader and composer. Then, temporarily, the leader became the reciter and stood out from the others. He would recite the verse and the clan or chorus would repeat a refrain that might or might not add to the idea of the chant. The refrain of the present, and of the Mediaeval song, shows a survival of this communal element retained for artistic purposes only.

Folk or communal song, that by the people as a whole, is closely connected with the dance. In fact, G. P. Upton sees the origin of the song in dance rhythm.[1] However that may be, whether the song preceded the dance or vice versa, the two, because of their rhythmic expression of emotion, were and are very closely connected.[2] In religious ceremonies in Greece, France and among the Teutons, as well as in the East, singing and dancing are to be accounted for both before and after written poetry begins. This communal song and dance, accompanying such feasts as the May agricultural festivals in France,

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[1]Upton, G.P., "The Song," Chicago, 1915, Chap. II, pp. 14-21. Jeanray "Les Origines de La Poesie Lyrique en France au Moyen Age." This French scholar sees the origin of popular song in the dance tunes of the women or young girls, where the feminine sentiments and feelings find expression. The refrain he says is a survival of strains from these songs.

[2]"Cambridge History of English Literature," Vol. II, Chap. XVI, p. 422.

was feminine in tone, due to the fact that the women did the tilling, planting, and home work. It was not until folk-song developed an art that it became essentially masculine. Even then the old feminine note is echoed in the songs where the poet is simply a narrator of the complaint or passion of a fair lady. This feminine element of folk-song enters into both secular and religious poetry; and finds expression in the latter in songs of Mary, especially in those dealing with her sufferings. A poem entitled "Who can not Wepe, com lerne of me" appears in a Middle English collection and exemplifies this survival.

"Sodenly a-frayd, half wakynge halfe slepyng,
ánd gretly dysmayd, a woman sate wepyng,
With fauour in here face for passynge my reson,
And of here sore wepyng þis was þe encheson;
Here sone yn here lappe layd, sche seyd, sleyn
by treson."[1]

This is a poem in 'aventure' form where the feelings and emotions of Mary, the Virgin, form the dominant note.

This development from folk to art poetry cannot be so easily traced in England as in France. Because of this fact, and because, in both its folk and art poetry, the French lyric affected the English so extensively the course of the lyric there may be briefly traced. Arising in the communal festivals and dance songs, by the time of the conquest the troubedours and trouveres had become a distinct class in Southern France. They were the descendants

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[1] E.E.T.S., v. 2. Furnivall, F.J., p. 126-7.

of the older leaders. This poetry, however, belongs to the art not the folk-song; to the rulers not the peasants. But, although it belonged primarily to the upper or court classes, this Provencal lyric had borrowed, or retained, certain elements from the earlier folk-song. Among these are, the praises of spring, a union of joy and youth, and the conception of marriage as a bondage from which woman wishes to escape. There is, however, in much of this courtly lyric poetry a sophistication and a convention that comes to be deplored. A love code of the age that sanctions the love of a married woman by another than her husband, arises. The despairing lover and the unrelenting lady are conventional characters. By the end of the thirteenth century this type had practically ceased. Its survival in the fourteenth, in new forms, was largely religious. The Provencal lyric, nevertheless, had a wide spread influence both on the continent and in England.

It was contemporary with certain satirical and moral poems dealing with topics of interest to the age, politically and socially. These songs are nearer to the early folk-song. Not that they are true folk-songs and entirely different from court poetry, but that they are closer to the emotions and interests of the humbler people.[1] So with the Middle Ages there is a developed art lyric in France with a fixed love code, a poetry of more national interest, and various verse and rhythmic forms to be adopted by the English.

The Conquest, as a matter of course, carried the French influence into England to a greater degree than ever before. The Normans took with them a love for the romantic and historical, and the troubadours carried the lyric forms and spirit. The latter gained great emphasis during the time of Henry II,

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[1]Chambers and Sidgwick, "Early English Lyrics," p. 267,

whose interest in Literature was supplemented by that of his wife, Eleanor of France, and her troubadour lover, Ventadorn, the greatest of his class.

There were other elements beside the love poetry of France that affected the Middle English lyric. The Christmas carols or Nowells found in England a fruitful soil. The Latin hymns also exerted a strong influence over the Middle English religious lyric both through translation and analogy. Latin phrases are used repeatedly as chorals or refrains, and the exaltation of the Latin hymns finds expression frequently. Professor E. B. Reed sums up his discussion of the subject thus: "We have now reviewed the lyric forms that left their impress on English song - the troubadour verse and the trouvere imitations of it, the poesie populaire, the Noels, the songs of the wandering scholars, and to these we should add the Latin Hymns, especially the large number that dealt with the lamentations of Mary at the foot of the cross - the planctus Maria."[1]

As he also says, the Middle English lyric was not entirely French and Latin. It is not to be supposed that the English people up until the eleventh century were not singing. There is preserved only one truly lyric poem in Anglo Saxon, "Deor's Lament", but many lyrical passages are to be found in other poems. From the rapid development of the lyric form in England after the Conquest, and the distinct English traits to be found in these lyrics, it is a more natural supposition that the songs were not recorded. The church men

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[1]Reed, E.B., "English Lyrical Poetry," p. 42.

were the only men capable of doing scribal work, and they probably thought the secular lyric unfit to be preserved.[1] In fact active measures were taken to stamp out these 'ungodly' songs. We may then conclude that English lyric life did not begin with the Middle Ages, but that it gained an unrestricted right to grow at that time. Professor E. B. Reed says of the Old English period: "We have found enough to make us understand how old are certain dominant characteristics of modern song. The love of adventure and combat; the delight in nature; the sense of mystery of the world and of the tragic aspects of life, have come down to us from our forefathers. Unconsciously we sing the same strain that fell from their lips. Even their manner of singing is still with us; for them alliteration gave to verse the same beauty we find in rhyme, and accordingly we still ornament our lyrics in their fashion. The Norman Conquest revolutionized the technique and the content of English song, but in all the changes we still hear echoes of the earlier lyric, notes that seem to come from some forgotten scop."[2] The fact that the Middle English lyric had entered the masculine, art-song stage would also tend to prove that the folk-song had passed through its various stages, and that the French lyric poetry found in England a soil favorable to its development.

We now have as a basis for a more detailed discussion of the Middle English religious lyric a background of Old English and French folk and art poetry, and Latin hymnology of a lyrical nature. The interweaving of the secular and the religious, and the interchanging of both content and form will come out in succeeding chapters.

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[1] Reed, E.B., "English Lyrical Poetry," p. 19.
[2] Ibid., p. 21.

## Chapter III

## THE ORIGINS OF THE MIDDLE ENGLISH RELIGIOUS LYRIC

The lyric life of the Middle Ages, so far as the recorded lyrics are concerned, seems to have centered largely in the religious experiences. Secular lyrics are numerous, but the religious lyrics far outnumber them. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the church still frowned upon the worldly songs, and that the men who recorded the poems gave a preference to those of a religious character. But not all churchmen were averse to the pretty secular songs, for many of them are preserved to us on the fly leaves, the backs, and the margins of strictly religious works as well as in manuscripts. The tendency of the age, though, seems to have been more serious and of a deeper religious nature in England than in France. The majority of the English poets were churchmen, and their literary productions naturally reflect their interests.

An important factor in determining the use of the English vernacular and the popular poetic forms was the attempt, on the part of the church, to draw the church and the people closer together; a tendency to make the Gospel clearer and more easy of access. The religious lyrics are in many cases a part of that attempt. Translations of the ritual and of the Bible were being made into the vernacular. Explanations and emendations avowedly designed for the use of the common people were appearing. Such works as those of Orm and Mannying attest a real interest in the religious welfare of those people who knew neither Latin nor French. The lives of saints were being written both in prose and verse for common use; for the benefit and edification of the less educated. Just so monks and clerks were turning portions of the church services into this popular medium. In all ages poetry seems to have been more easily retained

in the memory, and to have lent itself more effectively to congregational use. At this time, moreover, verse was a very popular form for nearly all literary matter, whether historical, social, political or religious. These men either purposely, or in accord with the general tendency used prevailing verse forms in their translations and adaptations.

The source for these poems lies chiefly in the liturgy. The Pater Noster, the confessionals, various service hymns and prayers, all found expression in this more popular medium. Matter and form are both derived from this source. The Latin itself did not entirely disappear, for there are many phrases appearing in the English indicative of a close relation to the Latin. Sometimes these lines are used as refrains, at others they alternate with the English, and in some poems they are used promiscuously throughout the song. The Latin element in the following hymn is illustrative of the poems where it predominates:

"Illa juventus that is so nise
Me deduxit into vain devise;
Infirmus sum, I may not rise.
Terribilis mors conturbat me."[1]

The refrain frequently forms the fourth line of the stanza rhyming a a a ᵛ as in this little poem of four stanzas:

"When Crist was born of Mary free
In Bedlem in that faire cite.
Angelles song ever with mirth and glee
In excelsis gloria.

"Herdmen beheld this angelles bright
To hem appered with gret light.

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[1]Chambers and Sidgwick, "Early English Lyrics," p. 149.

And seid 'Goddes sone is born this night.'
In excelsis gloria.

This king is comen to save kinde,
In the scriptur as we finde;
Therefore this song have we in minde,
In excelsis gloria.

Then, Lord, for thy gret grace
Graunt is the bliss to see thy face,
Where we may sing to thy solas
In excelsis gloria.[1]

A poem of like form in "Songs and Carols"[2] from a fourteenth century manuscript has varying Latin lines in the refrain.

Not only Latin phrases, but English phrases based upon the Latin of the liturgy are frequent. The seven deadly sins, the five wounds of Christ, the five joys of the Virgin, all come from the liturgy. But it is not alone redactions of the services that were influenced by the liturgy. The churchmen had made it a part of their lives, and it is not to be wondered at that it became a part of the more personal poems as well as of those written primarily for others. Professor F. A. Patterson speaking of the liturgical influence in the religious lyrics says: "It was the liturgy that generally suggested the subject matter of these poems. From it the writers took their words, their phrases, their sentences, their ideas - the very content of the poems."[3] He sees very little influence from the Latin hymns or devotional poetry, except as it is to be found in the rhythmic forms of English poetry.

Along with this tendency to bring the Bible and the church into closer

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[1] Chambers and Sidgwick, "Early English Lyric," p. 130.
[2] "Songs and Carols," T. Wright. Percy Society, v. 23, p. 53.
[3] Patterson, F.A. "Middle English Penitential Lyric," Intro. p. 25.

contact with the common people, was a growing nationalism in England. The men of England were beginning to feel that their language, life and institutions were separate from those of the continent. Many literary men were using the vernacular because they thought it a worthy medium, and because they saw in it possibilities of development. English was their own language and therefore worthy of preservation. The author of "cusor Mundi" says:

"Of Ingeland the nacion,
Es Inglis man þar in commun;
Þe speche þat man with mast may spede,
Mast þarwith to speke war nede.
Selden was for ani chance
Praised Inglis tong in France;
Give we ilk an þare langage,
Me think we do þam non outrage."[1]

These men not only knew the liturgy, but the Bible was a part of their daily study. Narrative portions, especially, contributed to the Christmas carols of the age. Events in the lives of Christ, the Virgin and the apostles appear again and again. The Wisemen, the Shepherds, the angel Gabriel, and many saints and martyrs are introduced to the reader. The purpose is always one of praising and of glorifying the Savior, and of expressing joy over his birth. The French Noels contain a great deal of this matter, and many English poems use both their content and form. The age was one in which narrative matter was particularly appealing. Romances, tales, ballads, Saints Lives and other literary forms attest to a strong liking for story telling. The beautiful story of

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[1]Emerson, O.F. "Literary Middle English Reader" pp. 133-4.

the Christ must then have had an especial appeal, because to the narrative interest it added a religious fervor.

Another strong French influence is that of the 'chanson amour' over the poems of the Virgin cult. The churchman, denied the privilege of gratifying his love passion on a worldly beloved, pours out that natural emotion of love-longing in songs to the Virgin. His is a heavenly beloved. To her he attributes the charms and beauties that the troubadour ascribes to his beloved. He pleads for her love and mercy as the worldly lover does for a sign of endearment from his lady.

"Come hyder, lady, fayryst flcure,
And kepe us, lady, from doloure;
Defend us, lady, and be our socoure;
For we cease not to cal to the
Revertere, revertere, the quene of blysse and of beaute."[1]

The cry for mercy and protection is an almost continuous one in poems to the Virgin. Her mildness, beauty and power are the three most noted of her characteristics. She is most frequently compared to a Rose; a French figure denoting great beauty, charm, and lovliness.

"Ladi seinte Marie! So Rose in Erber rede"[2]

Here the idea of Mary as a mediator between God and man, and the idea of her five joys as reasons for the granting of her mercy show liturgical influences.

A part of this cult, or rather a cause for it, was the great prevalence of the mystic spirit in the age. Especially during the later centuries

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[1]Wright, T., "Songs and Carols," Percy Society, v. 23, p. 57.
[2]Minor Poems of Vernon M.S. Part 1, E.E.T.S. v. 43, p. 31.

of the period the idea of reform, of a needed change in church and spiritual life became important. Mysticism, or the seeking of happiness and the joy of perfect content through a merging of the human with the divine, while true of a few men at all times in a period of religious change and reform becomes stronger, and can be seen as a distinct emotional force. The mystics wished, through a life of contemplation upon the divine, to come so close to God as to be merged with him. The efforts of these men to reach the desired goal passed through stages of conviction for sin and a confession of it; a state of deep repentance; and the final forgiveness of God and a gradual growth into his being. The last state, beyond forgiveness, was one seldom completed here. The ecstacies and passions of these men saw in the Virgin, the mother of the "Levidi Christ", an object for their adoration, praise and love. Together with those to Christ, the hymns to the Virgin show this mystical spirit, this struggle for perfection, and its emotional accompaniment as clearly as any other literature of this age.

The conception of Mary as a spiritual high priest, a mediator for man to God is a part of this Mary cult that may be explained in reference to the Neo-platonic influences at work. Not only Mary but the cross, the five wounds of Christ, the five joys of Mary, the nails in the hands and feet of Jesus, his graveclothes, all these appear as endowed with a spiritual power to lift men godward. They may have found their analogy in Plato's angels or intermediary forces that assisted man through his various steps toward the divine. Just as in Plato's philosophy man became a part of God by the aid of certain external forces, so the Christian mystic approached the union with his God.

As we look to the French and Latin literature for the source of much of the matter of the religious lyric of the Middle ages, so we must look there

for the forms as well. Here the debt to the French is again large, although much of the French influence goes back primarily to the Latin. This age was characterized by a transition from the old to the modern poetic verse forms. By its close nearly all of the modern poetic schemes had appeared, and many had been developed to a large degree. The Old English alliterative basis of rythm was giving way to the Latin and French rime and stress groundwork. Syllabic verse was becoming of supreme importance. The Latin septenary, the French rimed couplet and the French Alexandrine verse appear in the English. However, the English as a whole refused to comply with the absolute precision of the poetry of other nations. They held tenaciously to the freedom of adding or dropping unstressed syllables at the beginning and close of the lines.

The short rimed couplet, of four stress verses, was probably the most popular single form. But the more complicated rime schemes of the French appear, as do the uneven stanza and verse lengths. Not only did they vary in different poems, but uneven lengths of both verse and stanza appear in a single poem. A very common form was the quatrain a a a v, appearing frequently among the carols. The refrain (v) was often Latin or French. Such poems had, usually, only four stanzas. Poems of five short stanzas were also popular.

Most of these forms belonged to the French secular lyrics. Why they were adopted is not conclusive, but the fact that religious poets were trying to make their poetry attractive to the common people might account for their borrowing to some extent. The easy adaptability of these forms would also make them useful to the English poets. In all ages the English have proved themselves masters of the art of taking the thing conceived by another and using it effectively. They seem to have the genius of making foreign things their own, and of giving to them a distinct English personality. They did this with

their religious lyrics as well as with other things. Although both the subject matter and form of this type can be traced, to a large extent, to foreign sources, yet the Middle English Religious Lyric is still distinctly English. It owes its real life to the seriousness and sincerity of the English character revealed there.

## Chapter IV

## TYPES OF THE MIDDLE ENGLISH RELIGIOUS LYRIC

The Mediaeval religious lyric, like other literary forms may be classified as to content, form, or spirit as the interest or purpose of the student dictates. The content classification might easily follow that part of the outline in Chapter I dealing with the religious lyric. The forms might be referred to their origins, and the spirit to the interests and institutions that affected the age. An attempt will be made here to outline each briefly.

To bring more clearly before the mind the outline of Chapter I it is repeated here in so far as it refers to this special phase of the lyrics of this age.

A. Religious or moral in theme.

1. Connected with the church service.

a. Confession.
b. Praise and prayer.

2. Connected with Bible material.

a. Annunciation.
b. Nativity.

(1) Lullabies.
(2) Shepherds.
(3) Wisemen.

c. Saints.

3. Connected with the cult of the Virgin.

4. Moral instruction.

The confession poems of the age are an outgrowth of both the tendency to put the liturgy into the vernacular, and the deep conviction for sin that was being felt by all devout churchmen. The confessional was, as it still is, a recognized part of the church services. It was a vital part of both public

and private devotions. They contain in general a confession of sin, in which the sins may be listed in greater or less detail; a note of praise either for the Virgin or Christ, or for both; and a plea for forgiveness and guidance. The seven deadly sins are frequently confessed to, at times in great detail. The poet often gives a six or eight line stanza to each, elaborating the sin and its consequences. The two following poems from Professor F. A. Patterson's "Middle English Penitential Lyric" are typical of the group.

"I know [to Go]d, ful of myght,
And [to his] moder mayden bright,
And [to alle h]alouse here,
And [to ꝥe, fa]dre gastly,
ꝥat I [have s]ynned largely,
In mony synnes sere:
In thoght, in speche, and in delite,
In worde, and werk I am to wite
And worth to blame;
ꝥer-fore I praie saynt mary
and alle halouse haly,
In gods name,
And ꝥo preste to praye for me,
ꝥat god have merci and pyte,
For his manhede
Of my wreched synfulnes,
And gyue me grace and forgyuenes
Of my mys-dede."[1]

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[1]F. A. Patterson, "Middle English Penitential Lyric" p. 47.

The second poem is somewhat long for this discussion, but as it gives a clearer idea of the type than a description could I shall quote it in full.

"I knowlech to god, with veray contricon,
Vn-to seynt mary, and his seyntis alle,
ƿat, ƿorgh my frealte and wrecchid condicion,
In-to many synnes ofte haue I falle;
But aftir mercy now wille I calle,
With true confession, repentaunce,
(God graunt me space), and due penaunce.

"First: I knowlech ƿat I haue broken
His x.commaundmentis in many a place,
In werke, in worde, in ƿought, in token;
And often be vnkynd vn-to his grace;
Sweryng by his body, or by his face,
Taken in ydul his blessid holy name:
Wherfore y knowlech me gretely to blame.

"I haue not loued hym and dred as I shuld,
Neither serued hym in kepyng myne holyday;
But rather to playes and Iapes y wolde,
Then to serue god, rede, syng, or pray.
Al ƿe circumstaunce y can not say,
So synful y am and so vnstable,
For my defautes ben innumerable.

"My fader and moder I haue not obeyed,
As y shuld haue done, with helpe or mekenesse,

The balance of vertues I haue mysweyed,
With sleyng of tonge, or with wilfulnesse,
With lechory, or with þefte, or fals witnesse,
Covutyng wykkydly man or mannes wyfe
And oþer gode þat longed to þer lyfe.

"The seuen dedely synnes I can not excuse:
For I am gylty, in many maner wyse,
With delectacyon, consente, and vse;
Al now to reherce I may not suffyse;
In Pryde, Envye, wrath, Lechory, and covutyse,
Sleuth, and Glotony, with all þer spices.
Ales! al my life is ful of vices!

"And my fyue wyttes I haue ofte myspend;
To many vanytes castyng my syght,
And with my heeryng ful ofte y offend;
My smellyng, my tastyng, I spend not ryght,
My handes to synne haue ben ful light.
Thus haue I gouerned my wittes fyve,
And in synne mispended my lyve.

"The werkes of mercy I haue not fulfilled,
Aftir my power, as oft as I myght:
To helpe þe pore I was not beste willed,
With mete and drynke and cloþing þem dyght,
ȝeuyng no herborogh a - dayes or nyght,
Helpyng no prisoners, ne vysyting þe seeke;
To bery þe dede I was not meke.

"The gostely werkes y haue lefte also:
To councel and teche ƿem ƿat were lewde,
Geuying no comfort in socour and wo,
Neyther to chaste such as were shrewde,
And so ƿer harmes not sore me rewed,
Neyther forȝeuyng with true pacience,
Or prayed for ƿem ƿat dide me offence.

"I haue not reuerensed ƿe seuen sacramentes
ƿat ben ordenyd for my saluacion,
But of sore synned ƿat me repentes
Aftir my baptym and confirmacion;
My orders or wedlock standith in accusacion.
God graunt me penawnce, and holy brede,
And holy anoyntyng, or I be dede.

"All ƿis I knowlech in general,
Of synnes doyng, and leuyng good werkes.
ȝif I shulde nombre ƿe branches especial,
I shulde occupy to wryte ƿer-of many clerkes.
With synful lyfe my sowle derkes
That I can not see and lasse my defautes,
And euer my enemyes maketh many sautes.

"Now light me, holygost! with ƿi presence;
And ȝeue grace my lyfe to amende,
With drede, and pyte, and trew science,
With gostely strength to make a good ende.

Thy gracyous councel to me now sende,
With such vnderstondyng, and clere wisdome,
That y may come to ƿi kyngdome."[1]

One of the ideas stressed in these early poems was the vanity and uselessness of this life. Isaiah's strain "all is vanity" found an echo in these songs. England was in a statevery similar to that of the Hebrew kingdom and her prophets were crying out a similar warning. The call to a higher, nobler life is emphasized by a continued dwelling upon the transitory, useless character of this one. The poet here, after confessing his own sins, admonishes man:

"Man take hede what ƿu art!
But wormys mete ƿu wote wel ƿis!
Whanne ƿe erthe hath take his parte,
Heven or helle wolle haue his.
Uf ƿu doest welle ƿu goest to blis;
Uf ƿu do eville unto ƿy foo;
Love ƿy lorde, and thynke on ƿis,
Or wite ƿy self ƿyn owne woo!"[2]

The same theme is repeated in some poems entitled "Earth upon Earth". Two of these poems[3] begin alike and carry the same theme throughout. The longer one is more detailed and is paralleled by the shorter.

Erthe owte of erthe es wondirly wroghte,
Erthe hase getyn one erthe a dignyte of noghte,
Erthe appone erthe hase sett alle his thoghte,
How ƿat erthe appone erthe may be heghe broghte

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[1] Patterson, F.A."Middle English Penitential Lyric" pp. 47-50.
[3] Furniwall, F.J., E.E.T.S., v. 2, p. 88-9. Perry, G.G., E.E.T.S.,v.2, p. 95
[2] Patterson, F.A. "Middle English Penitential Lyric" p. 59.

Erthe appone erthe wolde be a kynge,

Bot howe ꝑat erthe to erthe sall, thynkis he no thynge.

So the poem proceeds, speaking of the vanity, hollowness, and sin of this world. This earth is degraded and made of no account to eternal life. A shadow of mysticism may be seen in this debasement of all things not divine, this desire to create a loathing for the material or worldly.

There are many songs of praise and prayers for mercy that closely connect themselves with the confession poems. They are some of them merely conventional forms, while others are sincere cries of adoration and devout pleas for mercy and guidance. The prayers and hymns of the church service were turned into the vernacular and many versions of the Pater Noster and the sacrament prayers appeared. These were at times mere translations, at others they were embellished and lengthened considerably, but with a retention of the theme. The Pater Noster, for example, frequently made a stanza for each of the original petitions. In such poems are to be found references to the cross, to the five wounds of Jesus, and to the five joys of the virgin as objects through the virtue of which mercy might be obtained. Here Jesus becomes the "Levedi", the all powerful, all merciful judge, the physician and healer of sick souls, the brother of mankind. The three fold nature of the Godhead seems to have had a peculiar significance for these religiously minded men. An invocation, a word of praise to the Trinity, is at times almost a conventional part of a poem. Christ's death for man's sins, and man's need of atonement are almost always present. The following prayer to Christ, found in "Religious Pieces" edited by Perry, has a note of praise, of thanksgiving, and a petition for mercy and guidance:

"Almighty God in trinite,

Inwardly I thanke ꝑe

For thy gud ded ȝat ȝou me wroghte,
And with ȝi precyous blude me boghte,
And of all gud ȝat ȝou lennes me.
Lorde, blyssede mott ȝou be!
Honour, Joye and lovyng
Be til ȝi name with-owttyn endyng!
Amen!

"Lorde God alweldande,
I beteche to-daye into ȝi hande,
My sawle and my body,
And all my Frendes specyally,
Bathe ȝe quik and ȝe dede:
Graunt them parte of my bede!
Kepe us all in erthe here,-
Fore ȝe prayere of thi modyr dere,
And all thy haloghes ȝat are in heven,-
Fra ȝededly synnes seven,
And fra fandyng of ȝe euyll wyghte,
And fra sodayne dede, bothe daye and nyghte!

"Schelde us fra ȝe paynes of hell,
ȝat bitter are to thole, and ffell,
And with thi grace fulfill vs all,
ȝat redy we may be to ȝi call;
And late vs neuer parte fra ȝe,
Alls thou for vs died one a tree!
Graunt vs, Lorde, ȝat [it] swa bee!

Amen! Amen, pur charite!"[1]

The poets seemed to fear a sudden and painful death, and prayer after prayer repeats the plea that Christ save them from such a fate. As strong as the personal note in many poems, is prayer for friends and acquaintances, and those in sin. These men felt a responsibility for the soul life of others.

Closely connected with the praise note of these prayers are the lullabies and carols. The former usually take dialogue form, in which Mary and the infant Jesus carry on the conversation. In some the child opens the dialogue and tells the mother of his coming anguish, suffering, humiliation, and death. The poet also manages to convey an idea of his coming greatness. In others Mary is pictured as lamenting over his lowly and obscure birth, he who is to be a great and glorious king. In such poems the child tries, but in vain, to comfort her. Mary's passion and suffering fill many religious poems of the age other than the lullabies. Two lullabies given in Chambers and Sedgwick's "Early English Lyrics"[2] give these two main types. One tells of the questioning of the child, and his realization of his mission. The other tells of Mary's lament and his answer to her. Both of these have the adventure opening; they are given as reports of something seen and heard by the poet. These two short stanzas illustrate a common opening.

"The endris night I saw a sight,
A maid a cradell kepe,
And ever she song and seid among
'Lullay, my child, and slepe.'"[3]

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[1]Perry, G.G., "Religious Pieces", E.E.T.S., v. 2A, p. 77. 26(1914)
[2]pp. 119-123.
[3]Chambers and Sidgwick, "Early English Lyrics," p. 119.

"This lovely lady sat and song,
And to her child con say,
'My sone, my broder, my fader dere,
Why liest thou thus in hay?
My swete brid, thus it is betid,
Thogh thou be king veray;
But nevertheless I will not cese
To sing, By by, lullay.'"[1]

The carols show a strong influence from the French Noels and many retain that chant. It appears in different poems in different ways, sometimes as a chant, at others as a refrain. This poem uses it as a call to the song:

"Nowel el! bothe eld and ȝyng,
Nowel el! now now we syng,
In worchepe of our hevene kyng,
Al-myty God in Trinite."[2]

The joy of the season is especially stressed. The people are called upon to rejoice over the birth of this heavenly child.

"Man, be glad in halle and bour,
This tyme was born our Savyour."[3]

"Man, be merie as bryd on berie, and al
thi care let away!"[4]

The following poem has a 'folky' atmosphere. The homely, at times almost coarse detail, makes the poem less finished than many; but the shepherds seem

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[1]Chambers and Sidgwick, "Early English Lyrics," p. 121.
[2]"Xmas Carols," Percy Society, v. 4, p. 15.
[3]Ibid., p. 11.
[4]Ibid., p. 14.

nearer to the people than in others of this type. There is here the same homely detail that appears in the popular element of the miracle and mystery plays.

"The shepard upon a hill he satt;
He had on him his tabard and his hat,
His tarbox, his pipe, and his flagat;
His name was called Joly Joly Wat,
For he was a gud herdes boy.
Ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

"The shepard upon a hill was laid;
His dog to his girdell was taid;
He had not slept but a litill braid,
But 'Gloria in excelsis' was to him said.
Refrain.

"The shepard on a hill he stode;
Round about him his shepe they yode;
He put his hond under his hode,
He saw a star as rede as blode.
Refrain.

"The shepard said anon right,
'I will go see yon farly sight,
Where as the angel singeth on hight,
And the star that shineth so bright.'
Refrain.

"'Now farewell, Mall, and also Will!
For my love go ye all still
Unto I cum again you till,
And evermore, Will, ring well thy bell.'

Refrain.

"'Now must I go there Crist was born;
Farewell! I cum again to morn.
Dog, kepe well my shepe fro ye corn,
And warn well 'Warroke' when I blow my horn!'

Refrain.

"Whan Wat to Bedham cum was,
He swet, he had gone faster than apace;
He found Jesu in a simpell place,
Between an ox and an asse.

Refrain.

"'Jesu, I offer to thee here my pipe,
My skirt, my tar-box, and my scripe;
Home to my felowes now will I skipe,
And also look unto my shepe.'

Refrain.

"'Now farewell, mine owne herdes man Wat!'
'Yea, for God, lady, even so I hat;
Lull well Jesu in thy lape,
And farewell, Joseph, with thy round cape!'

Refrain.

"'Now may I well both hope and sing,
For I have bene at Cristes bering;
Home to my felowes now will I fling.
Crist of heven to his bliss us bring!'
Refrain."[1]

There are a number of poems, dealing with Bible matter related to that of the carols, that might be called Annunciation songs. In these the message of the angel Gabrial is reported. He is pictured as rendering homage and adoration to the Virgin; as delivering his message on bended knee. Mary's first confusion and questioning is followed by her entire submission and her gentle acquiescence. The divineness of her mission, and her purity are both present in all the poems with this general theme. This five short stanza poem gives the matter and the spirit of these poems.

"Regina celi letare
"Gabriell, that angell bryȝt,
Bryȝter than the sonne is lyȝt,
Fro hevyn to erth he took hys flyȝt.
Letare
"In Nazareth that gret cete,
Before a maydyn he knelyd on kne,
And seyd, Mary, God is with the.
Letare
"Heyll, Mary, full of grace,

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[1]Chambers and Sidgwick "Early English Lyrics" pp. 127-9.

God is with the and ever was;
He hath in the chosyn a place.

Letare

"Mary was afrayd of that syȝt,
That came to her with so great liȝt.
Than seyd the angell that was so bryȝt,

Letare

"Be not agast of lest ne most,
In the is conseyved the holy gost,
To save the soules that war for-lost.

Letare."[1]

The poets not only sang in praise of Jesus and Mary, but of the many saints as well. Some are to a single saint; others to various saints; a number being named; and still others to the saints in general. Either the events of the lives are recounted or certain traits extolled. In the later case certain events are usually taken as a starting point. These songs are usually in remembrance and praise of the particular saint or saints, and above all to gain from their special merits and prayers mercy and pardon from God. The saints are considered, according to the church creed, as having an over abundance of grace which they will dispense to penitent men. Often a petition to a saint or saints is to be found in prayers to Christ and to the Virgin. 'By all the holy saints' is a common, and at times conventional prayer phrase.

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[1] "Songs and Carols," Percy Society, v. 23, pp. 33-4.

Stephen and John seem to have been loved very dearly by these religious poets, whose interest in the lives of saints was very great at this time. The Middle English period marks the height of saints' legend development both in England and on the continent. The prose and verse versions of their lives and deeds were almost innumerable. It is not surprising then that their deeds and characters should furnish material for the religious lyrics of the age. Professor F. A. Patterson quotes a song to St. Elene in his "Middle English Penitential Lyrics":[1]

"Saint elene, j ȝe pray
To helpe me at my last day
To sette ȝe crosse and his passione
Betwix my synfull saule and dome;
Now, and in the houre of my dede,
And bring my saule to requied."

A very interesting poem connected with this lyric, and one that shows the customs of the season, is the one included in the Christman Carols in the Percy Society collection.[2] The poem takes the form of a game in which Christ summons each apostle to a place beside him, giving a description of the work and character of each that entitles him to the place. In the same volume there is a carol to St. Stephen, where his death is compared to that of a brave and valiant knight. His faith and charity are the two virtues stressed. The poet expresses a wish that he may display as great charity in his death. St. Edmund one of the most popular saints of the period was also celebrated in both song and story.

"A newe song i wil begynne,
Of Kyng Edmund that was so fre,

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[1] p. 72.
[2] Percy Society, v. 4, pp. 28-31.

How he deyid withoute synne,
And bow(n)dyn his body was to a tre.

"Wyth arwys scharpe they gunne hym prykke,
For non rewthe wold they lete,
As dropys of reyn they comyn thikke,
And every arwe with other gan mete.

"And his hed also thei of smette
Among the breres thei it kest,
A wolf it kept withoutyn lette,
A blynd man fond it at the last.

"Pray me to that worthi kyng
That sufferid ded this same day,
He saf us, bothe eld and yyng,
And schild us fro the fendes fray."[1]

We have here an indication of the persecutions that were commonly ascribed to the lives of saints. An echo of the miraculous appears in the details of the wolf's guardianship and the blind man's discovery. The saints held a distinguished and honored place during the Middle Ages, and it is to be expected that they should appear in song as well as in story.

But perhaps the most peculiar feature of the Middle Ages was the Cult of the Virgin. This had its source in several of the other tendencies of the age. It counterparts the French secular love code in many respects. Mary had been given a place among the saints in the prayer book; legends and apocryphal stories were centered around her name. She had come to represent to the

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[1]Ritson, J., "Ancient Songs and Ballads", pp. 123-4.

Mediaeval mind the one perfect woman; the spotless, matchless mother and maid. She was exalted and adoredas the one through whom God had made himself manifest to man. She thus shared in the Divine through a special merit. The mysticism that was rife throughout this age produced in many of the church poets a high emotional state. In their efforts to reach a plane where they should become spiritually merged with the Divine they experienced visions of Christ, of the cross and other objects associated with their worship. Many of them had this personal contact with Mary. To them she was a reality, and they talked and sang to her as if she were present.

As has been said before, these men who, because of their calling, were denied the earthly satisfaction of their natural love longings sought it in pouring out their emotional impulses to this divine being. The most highly developed, the most finished love poetry of the age was that of the troubadours of France. It was the poetry richest in love terms and conceits. The cult of Beauty so highly developed there gave to these religious love poets material for their own passionate outbursts. Like the troubadours they attributed to their 'beloved' the most perfect physical and spiritual charms that they could conceive. They used the forms and figures of the secular love poetry. As in the case of the cult that they paralleled there was a tendency for their poetry to become conventionalized. But in these poems, as in the secular love poetry of England, there was a freshness and sincerity that all the conventions were never able to hide. The English nature seems to have been more serious, more honest and more sincere than the French in its emotional expression. The people were not so accustomed to open declarations of feeling and, therefore, when emotion came it meant more to them.

In the religious songs of this age are many of these Mary poems of praise and adoration to the Virgin. She is represented as the flower of woman-

hood without an equal. Her purity, her meekness, her mildness, and her mother love are her dominant traits. Two poems of this kind, from a thirteenth century manuscript, appear in the Early English Text Society publications, volume thirteen. These two stanzas from the first one are as beautiful both in thought and spirit as any secular love song.

"Edi bes þu heuen quene
folks froure and engles blis.
moder unwemmed and maiden clene
swich in world non oþer nis.
On þe hit is wel eþ sene
of alle wimmen þu havest þet pris.
mi swete leuedi her mi bene
and reu of me ȝif þi wille is.

"þu asteȝe so þe daiȝ rewe
þe deleð from [daiȝ] þe deorke nicht.
of the sprong a leome newe
þat al þis world haveð iliȝt.
nis non maide of þine heowe;
swo fair, so sschene, so rudi, swo bricht.
swete leuedi of me þu reowe;
and have merci of þin knicht."[1]

The figure opening the second stanza is very beautiful and poetic. The last line of the same stanza shows a connection between the love gallantry

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[1]E.E.T.S. Appendix, v. 13, p. 255.

of the knight for his lady, and the passion of the religious poet for his heavenly beloved. The poem contains, beside praise, the ever present plea for Mary's intercession with God in the poet's favor. She is called upon to save the poet from the pain of death and hell. This extract gives a good exposition of the mission Mary was thot to have performed for mankind.

"Thu art hele and lif and light,
And helpest al mon-kunne;
Thu us havest ful well i-dizt,
Thu eve no weole and wunne,
Thu brohtest dai, and Eve nizt;
Heo brozte woht, thy broztest rizt,
Thu almesse, and heo sunne.
Bi-sih to me, lavedi brizt,
Hwenne ich schal wende heonne,
So wel thu miht."[1]

A poem known as Godric's hymn to the Virgin shows, in its abruptness, an emotional state in which all else must have been absent. Godric himself believed that the Virgin taught it to him in a dream.

"Sainte Marie, Virgine,
Moder Jesu Cristes Nazarane,
Onfo scild, help þin Godric,
Onfang, bring hehlic wið þe in Godes ric.

"Sainte Marie, Cristes bur,
Maidenes clenhad, moderes flur,
Dilie mine sinne, rixe in min mod,

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[1]Percy Society, v. 11, "Religious Songs", p. 65.

Bring me to winne wiþ self God."[1]

In Professor F. A. Patterson's book, "The Middle English Penitential Lyric" there is a hymn of confession addressed to Saint Mary. Later he quotes a song to the Virgin beginning with a common figure:

"Of on þat is so fayr and briȝt,
velud maris stella,
Briȝter þan þe day-is liȝt,
parens et puella."[2]

The following stanza fairly equals the praise of a lover for an earthly maiden:

"Swete and benygne moder and may,
Turtill trew, flowre of women alle,
Aurora bryght, clere as the day,
Noblest of hewe, þus we the calle;
Lyle fragrant eke of the walle;
Ennewid wiþ bemys of blys,
In whom never was founden mys."[3]

In all these poems we see the mystic desire for perfection. The poet pleads with Mary to win forgiveness for him and help him to come to God. There are poems urging her assistance because of the five joys and blessings of her life,- the annunciation, the birth, the resurrection, the ascension, and her position at his side after death. Mary's passion over her son's death, and her sorrowing at the cross form a common theme. The picture of Jesus entrusting her to his beloved apostle, Saint John, appears in a number of

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[1]Cook, A.S., "Literary Middle English Reader," p. 454.
[2]Patterson, F.A., "Middle English Penitential Lyric," p. 96.
[3]Ibid., p. 153.

poems. This suffering of hers is supposed to have given her a strong sense of pity for sinful men, and she is represented as praying for them always. The poet here, after speaking of Mary's sorrow and Jesus' efforts to comfort her, says:

"When he ros, þo fel hire sorewe,
Hire blisse sprong þe þridde morewe;
Blyþe, moder, were þou þo!
Levedy, for þat ilke blisse,
Bysech þi Sone of sunnes lisse;
þou be oure sheld azeyn oure fo."[1]

The Virgin was a real personality to these men. They talked and sang to her as to one in the flesh who heard and answered. Yet there is a strong sense of the divine, a passionate spiritual ecstacy not to be missed in these Virgin poems.

Almost as varied as the content of these poems was their form. The change of poetic form from the alliterative to the stress and syllabic basis can be traced in the religious lyric as well as in other poetic types. The rimed couplet, coming from the Latin through the French, appeared here as well as in the romances, legends, chronicles, and didactic verses. The short line with alternate or more complicated rythm was almost equally popular. Two foot lines were used. The following are some rime schemes selected here and there from various poems. They are simply illustrative of the variety of such schemes then in use.

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[1]Cook, A.S., "Literary Middle English Reader," p. 461.

a b a b c c b d d b

a a b c c b

a a a b a b

a b a b a b b c c c b

a b a b b c b c

a a b c c b

a a b c c b d d b

a a b a a b c b c b

The monorhyme appears with both short and long lines and stanzas. A common form, especially among the carols, is a a a v, the last line usually a French or Latin refrain. At times the refrain is English and at others it is not, properly speaking, a refrain but varied lines of French or Latin.

The eight foot line of the French couplet is the most common verse form. However, it is used in the English with both the added and dropped unstressed syllable thus giving trochaic or even dactylic meter, although iambic is the usual form. The French septenary line also appears with its fourteen syllables grouping themselves eight and six. This gave rise to the later English fifteen syllable line. The poem "Earth to Earth" has four verse monorhymed stanzas with lines varying from eight to eighteen syllables in length. The line length varies in the same stanza as well as in different stanzas. The stanza as well as the line length is not fixed and it sometimes varies in the same poem. At times there is a regularity of variation, at others none. Frequently phrases, words, petitions, or ideas are repeated at the beginning of one stanza from the close of the preceding one, in order to secure unity. This was another French device used very successfully by the English.

This poetry also displays language differences due to dialect usage in

the different localities. These variations are difficult to trace, however, where only printed sources are available, as freedom has already been taken with some of the texts in many instances. Where the place of composition of a poem cannot be decided from the name of the author, or from a definite reference within the poem itself, it cannot be satisfactorily settled from such second-hand evidence as printed editions offer. The language was changing rapidly all over England and the differences between early twelfth and early fifteenth century English is discernible in these religious poems.

The spirit of the poems of this age was, as is true of all literature, a reflection of the tendencies of the age along social, political and moral lines The age was one of transition, of change and growth. It was approaching that wonderful sixteenth century, one of the land-marks in English Literary History. England was becoming a nation with a national spirit, a national church, a national government, and a national literature. The early thirteenth century, one of the most flourishing centuries of this era, witnessed the English peoples' first great stand for democratic English politics. During this age the old church establishment, as well as the state, was losing its hold. The nation was beginning to demand a church owing allegiance to it, not to an outside power. The old fabric was proving too weak for the new responsibilities, and it was decaying in many parts. The need for reform had been recognized, and satiric poems adversely criticizing both the church and its leaders were written in the vernacular as early as the reign of King John. The old religious and political fibers of the nation were being replaced. The devout churchmen were doing their part to improve the old church organization, and make of it a good foundation for the new national establishment. The conflict between the old church and the new state was becoming very bitter and by the time of Chaucer the two institutions had come to blows frequently. Chaucer paints

for us a picture of the age which is good both in outline and in detail. Its mixture of good and bad, of careful and careless, of spiritual and worldly, of virtue and vice, of truth and falsehood, of honesty and theft, is shown here in detail and in large. At first glance one might think the age the most corrupt in English history; but when the late seventeenth century or the present age are compared to it, and conditions and times are considered, the observer almost refuses to pass any judgment. The present age is better, but is it enough better? The centuries from 1100-1500 were corrupt but they were not entirely evil.

That men wrote these religious lyrics is one proof that the age had possibilities of higher and nobler characters and ideals. Their authors felt the spirit of unrest, of uneasiness and of instability. They realized the decay of the church, and the effect of this decay upon the nation. The necessity for a broader, wider religious education was felt and so these farther seeing men began to use the vernacular, the popular medium of communication. The English authors began to think of their language as a national asset, and as a proper vehicle for popular and national literature. A note of a growing nationalism can be detected in the use of English for those things that all people should know. A stronger sense of this same nationalistic spirit can be seen in the poets use of the vernacular to express their own personal, subjective feelings of adoration and praise.

Perhaps the most important spirit of the age affecting religious literature of subjective thought was the mysticism that entered into the lives of so many of these men. Things were in a sort of chaos, and these men were trying to find a solid basis upon which to place their faith and future happiness. Mankind had failed and deluded them and they were attempting to get something upon which they could depend. In the very earnestness of their

endeavors they went to extremes. In their efforts to become one with the Divine they experienced mental and spiritual stages removed from the immediate physical forces around them. They reached exalted emotional states, in which they experienced, to them, actual contact with Christ, with Mary and others. Poetic utterance seemed the only capable medium for the expression of such sentiments. The poems of passionate praise and adoration were the result of such experiences. They are lyrical because of the deep personal and subjective note, and the singleness of theme. They are outbursts of feeling in song. Just as emotion and rhythm were connected in the beginnings of song, so they are found here as accompaniments of one another.

The religious lyrics, then, as concerns content fall under the following heads: those with their matter based upon the church services; those with their matter based upon the Bible; those with their matter based upon personal thought and experience. The form divides them as to French or Latin origins. The spirit appears as nationalistic, educative, and mystic.

## Chapter V.

## THE PLACE OF THE MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRIC IN THE LATER DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LYRIC.

The Middle English period from the Norman Conquest through the time of Chaucer might, in so far as literary periods may be defined, be called the budding age of the English lyric. The roots of a lyric poetry were already in the English spirit and in the unrecorded folk-song of this people. Lyrical strains and passages are to be found in Old English verse, although but one poem that can be called a lyric has been preserved. "Deor's Lament" in its subjective personal feeling, and its musical quality is the one Old English poem primarily lyrical. The Middle English centuries, however, yield a rich storehouse of lyrics both secular and religious. It has been the purpose here to deal largely with the religious lyric, but that type borrowed so largely from the secular that in tracing later lyric development a discussion of the latter could scarcely be avoided altogether.

From the age of Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate and Occleve until the time of Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser and Shakespeare, general histories of English Literature have little to say concerning lyrical poetry. England was in the throes of both civil and foreign warfare. The old church organization was coming more and more into disfavor and the importance of the religious poetry from this source was lessening. The liturgical element of religious poetry was never again to have so much influence in English song life. Not that the new churchmen did not express themselves in poetry, but that the new order brought new material and even new forms. Herbert and Crashaw put into their poetry a religious analysis more introspective, more philosophical and metaphysical than that of the former age. These men, like their predecessors, were near to God,

but more in spirit than in flesh. They experienced a form of that mystical ecstacy of the Middle English poets. This was, more probably, an accompaniment of their experiences and their own natural tendencies than a survival of a past age. But there is not to be found here such a prevalence of supernatural experience as entered into the lives of the poets of the former age.

The Virgin Cult, so peculiar to the Middle Ages, has, as such, virtually disappeared, and with it the type of lyric to which it gave rise. No other period in English literary history has witnessed such a wide development of a similar type. Poems to the Virgin no doubt have been written since the Mediaeval epoch, but never in such a degree and of such a uniformity as to make them recognizable as a type. The Virgin poems, as I have described them in the thesis, belong to the Middle Ages. They are a distinct and peculiar contribution of that epoch.

The Nowels, a Mediaeval species, native to the French and copied by the English, appear as late as the seventeenth century, and modern poems in imitation of them have been written.[1] One of the most beautiful, sung and enjoyed today, is the carol beginning:

"The first Nowell the Angell did say
Was to three poor Shepherds in the fields as they lay;
In the fields where they lay keeping their sheep
In a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel."[2]

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[1] Rickert, Edith, "Ancient English Christmas Carols". Apendix 11.
[2] Percy Society, Vol. 4, "Xmas Carols". p. 75.

Among the most popular old carols is that one from which Tiny Tim quotes in Dicken's "Christmas Stories":

"God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Savior
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas Day."[1]

The simple, spontaneous carols of the older English poets have found a responsive cord in modern hearts.

Chivalry and the knight in armor did not disappear with the destruction of the feudal system. The old knightly chivalry of the armed warrior appears in a conventional and polished dress during Queen Elizabeth's time, in courtly poetry. There are few traces of Mediaeval courtly love in the later religious poetry; but the unrelenting maiden or mistress, the disconsolate and despairing lover, and the slighted maid continue to be typical characters of the secular lyric of love. During the time of Elizabeth English poetry continued to use much of the older material and many of the older forms. The spirit and form are, however, becoming more refined; the old is growing better and bigger; the new poets are attempting to express age-old emotions in a more beautiful dress.

The pastoral that was so prominent during the seventeenth and early

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[1]Rickert, Edith, "Ancient English Christmas Carols", p. 105.

eighteenth centuries reflects much of the character of Middle English nature and love poetry. Here the English imitated another French type popular during the Middle ages. Form, spirit, incident, characters and expression point to the early species. As a whole the tendency is toward beauty of expression and form rather than sincerity of emotion.

Each new age as it adds some new things turns to the old for spirit, matter and form. The two most notable forms entering English verse since the Middle Ages, and affecting lyrical poetry, are Wyatt's sonnet form from the Italian Petrarch and the ode from Pindar. The introduction of the later was wrongly assigned to Cowley, who introduced an irregular form that has, however, retained the name ode. The majority of English Odes follow the irregular form. The fundamental basis for modern poetic rhythm, the foot and accent or stress line, was a part of the Mediaeval development. The poets of the Middle Ages in France, Italy and England did much toward developing rime schemes also. Mediaeval rime schemes are still effectively used. Alliteration, which was displaced by French fashions of versification, has never appeared again as a sole or fundamental basis for poetic rhythm.

The Middle Ages had found three of the greatest subjects for lyrical poetry - love, nature and religion. Numerous and varied poetic forms suitable to lyric expression had also come into existence during these years. The fields have broadened and the forms multiplied, but the Middle Ages witnessed the virgin growth of the written English lyric both secular and religious. In this period, too, lyric ceased to be synonymous with song; the word has come to mean a short musical expression of subjective personal feeling.

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